

Child and Family Services Update

July 3, 2003

The Role Of Men In Adoptions

By LeRoy Franke

I have been a fan of NFL football over the years. A particular interest of mine has been watching the sideline cameras as they pan the benches. From the round faces of the massive linemen to the chiseled faces of the muscular running backs I have noted they all have one thing in common. When the camera focuses on them they flash a big smile, hold up a hand and say, **“Hi Mom!”** Over the past 25 or so years, I have yet to see one say “Hi Dad.”

As we work with adopted families our experience is quite similar. Susan Egbert, who conducts our adoption satisfaction surveys, reports that adoptive moms complete about 95% of the questionnaires. Similarly, about 95% of the payees listed on our adoption assistance agreements are the mothers. No one can overestimate the power of mother in the life of a child. The parenting mother, either biological or adoptive, has an obvious major role in shaping the life of a child.

So where do dads fit into this equation? What role do fathers, particularly adoptive fathers, play in the lives of the children they parent?

I remember my last visit with my father two days before his death. He was lamenting a number of misgivings about having not been a better father. He had worked in the parts department of a local car dealership until he was 68 years of age. He worked faithfully each day from 8:00 AM to 6:00 PM, plus one night a week until midnight, and every Saturday from 8:00 AM to 1:00 PM. In spite of his hard work, we did not have a lot of things money could buy and there were few family vacations. During those years he served on a credit union board and was faithful to his religious commitments. Somehow, as busy as he was, we all knew he loved his family dearly. Yet at his death, he still felt there was so much more he could have done for us. We all reassured Dad at that time that he had been a wonderful father. We told him that his love, patience, loyalty to us, his friends and church, honesty, kindness, and goodness had powerfully impacted all of us throughout our lives. I reminded him of the Sundays he had taken me to the parts department and gotten a part to take to a stranded motorist on the highway outside of Salt Lake somewhere. What better lesson on love and service could I have been taught? There was no question as to our importance in his life. Most importantly, there was never any question in my mind the kind of man and father he believed I could become.

So, I believe that it is the hundreds of small things our dads, grandfathers, big brothers, uncles, and other men in the lives of our children do that make a huge difference. It could be the breakfast dad cooks every Saturday morning, or the pancakes or French toast that are his specialty on the camping trip. It is his taking time to call while on a business trip to check on how his daughter did at the school play, or the son at his t-ball game that night. It is taking the time to listen to his

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daughter at midnight and laughing with her as she tells about the disasters of her first date. It is the help with the science project or difficult math problem. It is running behind the bike for several miles until the wobbly first rides become more stable. It is then fixing the flat on the bike tire for the third time that month, showing the seven-year-old how he can learn to find the leak in a tub of water. It often is the disciplining role where boundaries are again clarified and the necessary course corrections made. It might be catching the first fish, the Daddy/Daughter dance at the school, cheering at the soccer game, or just cooking smores over a campfire.

Be it our sons or daughters, fathers, or other positive male role models in single parent households, play a key role in the healthy development of both boys and girls. The most important factor is quality time with each child at his or her level of understanding and need. That can occur spontaneously or in well-planned activities. It happens in brief encounters or over longer periods of time together, such as a day skiing or hiking.

The most important role dads play is the ability to help a child feel valued and appreciated. This is done mainly through kindness and affirmations. Affirmations notice and point out the good we see in the other person. I found that often when I came home after a hard day's work I would tend to be uptight and often see the negative in things at home. "Who was supposed to take out the garbage?" "Why is the TV on and no one watching it?" Lorna and I discussed the issue as she noticed upon my arrival the kids would disappear outside or into other parts of the house, and she wished she could too.

So we implemented what we called "the 10 minute rule." That is for the first 10 minutes I came home I would only engage in positive affirmations with family members. "Hi Richard. It is nice to see you playing Nintendo with Devin." "The dogs look great. Who gave them a bath?" Amazingly, it not only changed both my attitude and relationships upon arriving home, but also set a happier tone for the whole evening.

So, like my Dad, you fathers, grandfathers, brothers, and uncles are doing better than you might think. Affirm yourselves for the great job you are doing, and even if we don't get the "Hi Dad's" from the bench, we can rest assured we are valued and appreciated.